

# CHALLENGE

A LITERARY  
QUARTERLY

ESLANDA GOODE ROBESON  
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# CHALLENGE

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# Tale of The Blackamoor

By WILLIAM A. ATTAWAY

The little blackamoor followed in the wake of the proud duchess and gracefully carried her floating train. Louder and louder sounded the strains of the minuet as they neared the great halls where the courtiers pirouetted and swept the marble before their ladies' shoes with their snow-white plumes.

At the first archway the proud duchess waved back her tiny train-bearer and swept away in the arms of a gallant gentleman who wore the pearls of nobility on his satin coat.

The little blackamoor glanced down at his ridiculous red pantaloons, and the pearls of anguish rolled down his satin-black cheeks. He looked at his tiny stick legs in their clinging silk, and the tears of pearl dropped down to the pointed toes of his red shoes.

Ah, how he loved the minuet... how he longed to bow and turn to the fruited notes of the throbbing strings. His tears fell no more; in his mind he saw himself a young gallant touching the fairy tips of a lady's fingers and floating the length of the gold-decked hall.

But, alas! He was after all only a lonely little blackamoor in a court of great people. He turned and crept sadly through the castle halls to his chamber in the top-

most turret. There, away from the melody and the minuet's sweep, he pined for the beauty that for him could never be.

\* \* \* \*

The duchess lay among her lacey pillows and lent her ear to the strange tales of the merchant who knelt among his goods from many lands. She fanned herself languidly with the saffron wing of the paradise bird and looked down at the little blackamoor sitting cross-legged on a red pillow at her feet.

"Tell me," she commanded, "of all these strange goods, which is there among them that holds your fancy?"

The little blackamoor looked long at the heaps of precious jewels: blood rubies from the eyes of pagan idols, milky moonstones of island shores, jade of unknown India, white sparklets of molten star-dust. He looked long at the bales of virgin linen and the gaudy silks, and the heavy hair-stuffs woven in the northlands. His eyes swept over the golden balls, brass anklets, silver pins, and carved shell combs. There was nothing to catch his fancy.

But wait! There among a heap of bales lay a bright red feather and a Dresden china doll. The feather was meant for the hat of

a handsome courtier, and the dainty china doll for the boudoir of a lovely lady.

"Look ye!" cried the little blackamoer. "For myself I choose the brave red plume."

"Ye shall have it," smiled the duchess, "but of me—what will ye have for me?"

"For ye, O Lady, who have the wealth of all our land at your finger-tips—for ye I say the Dresden china doll."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was night and the dark light beat against the stone of the high turret. The little blackamoer grew wide awake. Far down in the castle he heard the memory of the haunting minuet.

He arose and dressed himself quickly in his blue velvet coat, his lace-white shirt, red satin pantaloons, silk stockings and needle-tipped shoes. From a hiding place he brought out a wide-brimmed hat and in the crown he stuck the brave red plume.

On tip-toe he came down the winding stair and stopt every now and then to listen for the reassuring strain of the beckoning music. As he came to the halls of the duchess, his heart stood still and then fluttered with foreboding. Suppose that what he wished for most were not there? He parted the curtain of the boudoir just a trifle and applied one tiny black

eye to the opening. His heart stopped fluttering and sang like a coppersmith's hammer. There, looking straight at him—expecting him—was the dainty china doll.

He thought not of the sleeping duchess as he strode gallantly across the room, his little hard heels clicking on the polished floor. He stopped, his back arched, and he bravely swept the toe-tips of the china doll with the plume of his hat.

She smiled behind her fan and laid her fingers upon his outstretched arm. As they left the room he held back the curtains and in the same movement bowed for her to pass. There were no words spoken.

From far down the halls, growing louder and louder came the sweeping music of the minuet. It seemed to bid them hurry, hurry, for the night will not last—the moonlight will pass.

As they reached the sable halls of the minuet, the silver fell through the great stone arches in the castle walls and flowed liquid in the furthermost corners.

Thus the great halls decorated themselves not in vulgar gold, but donned a cloak of cool virgin silver. And here to the fruited notes of the throbbing strings, he touched the fairy tips of dainty fingers and danced the memory of the minuet with the Dresden china doll.

# Off Shore

F. V. S. EVANS

Away to the east the long chain of mountains dwindled in the distance. The rocks at the point to the right of the lighthouse stood out like smudges against the pale pink of the sky from which the rays of the setting sun were swiftly fleeing. A flock of a dozen pelicans skimmed one behind the other towards the land, lazily flapping their wings. A breeze, heavy with the smell of earth and trees, flew down the mountain sides and raced over the water, ruffling the sluggish billows rolling away under the lea. One star, then another, and then a third winked furtively from the evening sky, now a dull pearl. *La Bonita*, running close to the wind, laden with plantains, hides, gasoline drums and pigs, reared her bow over the oily swells to plunge deeper into the belly of the next wave.

The thin thread of foam at the base of the cliffs was lost in the oncoming night. The green of the bush and the splashes of yellow and red disappeared in the darkness. The blaze of light from the end above the ugly pile of black rocks threw a strip of light like liquid silver on the surface of the water.

Down in the dingy cabin, bare except for a table and two bunks with their dirty mattresses, three men were sitting, two on boxes, and one on the steps of the ladder leading to the deck. Nothing in particular distinguished one from the other. Muscular, unkempt and soiled, clad alike in trousers and vest, they chatted, their greasy faces shining in the light of the lantern swinging from a hook in the roof.

A big heave as the ship's prow rose on the bosom of a larger swell; all the blocks and joints creaked, and the man at the wheel righted her as she slid down its back, butting into the following one, sending a sheet of spray flying into the air. The pigs squealed as the water fell upon them, and slipped and tumbled about on the wet boards trying to get under each other for shelter.

Three passengers, a man, a woman and an infant in arms, covered over with blankets, sat on a pile of canvas with their backs to the wind, leaning against the two water casks.

In the galley one of the sailors was busy boiling water for the coffee. The thick smoke

from the almost green wood blew towards the stern, getting into the eyes of the helmsman and blurring his vision. He turned his back to it, spat into the sea, casting a glance now and then over his shoulder to see that the course was being kept.

Two tall palm trees stood out distinct at the very end of the point against the golden haze of the rising moon.

The strip of light from the lighthouse cut the sloop in two as it rolled onward over the backs of the swells veering away to the west to clear the mass of rocks and foam at the base.

The sails flapped against the ropes and the blocks whined as they tightened with the strain. The captain got up from his box and poked his head out of the hatchway, looked at the lighthouse, at the sails, then at the bow of the ship, and went below again.

The wind straightened as they neared the end of the chain of hills sloping away. The waves ran higher and faster. *La Bonita* caught unexpectedly, swallowed a surge, jerked herself free of the next two and leaning on her side, let the wind drive her past the point with the foam boiling at her bosom.

The moon stood poised above the land and slowly, with almost a solemnness, it climbed into the

sky, unrolling a carpet of gold over the dancing sea. The helmsman took his bearings from the speck of red light flashing in the distance, noted the direction of the wind, the lay of the land, and commenced to tack.

The coffee was ready. A big, grey enamelled pot, full to the top, was taken to the cabin, the steam rising from the spout. The boy set mugs, sugar, and milk. Still talking, the captain filled the cups, adding a stiff shot of rum to his, drank a mouthful from the bottle and handed it to his companions. The boy wiped the table clean with a dirty rag, threw it into a corner, picked up the pot, sugar and milk and came on deck. He served the man on watch and some passengers with coffee and some dry biscuits. The man passenger took a sip to see if he could keep it down, then another, and so on until he finished.

They had now run far out into the gulf, the speck of red light that served to guide them was well away to the left. Round went the wheel. She rose with her nose in the wind. The sails wagged and the ropes swayed. The big boom swept over the bended back of the stooping man. The canvas filled out like the belly of a pregnant animal.

The male passenger rose hurriedly, stumbled to the side of

the ship to vomit, belching all the time. The woman called to him, searched for a bottle of cologne and poured some on her handkerchief to be ready when he returned.

Three more long tacks and the group of islands lay a mile to the west. Now they were heading for the tall chimney with its tuft of black smoke rising from among the twinkling of hundreds of lights. Then the wind fell.

*La Bonita* was as still as a log on the lifeless sea. Only the incoming tide moved her closer to the harbor. Six black bulks, dotted with lights, lay anchored astern. Dead quiet. The starboard light had gone out and the one on the port side was smutting. A long thin white cloud mounted the brow of the hill and trailed over the face of the moon—darkness and stillness. It hurried away and another pursued it. The cook came on deck, blew his nose overboard, wiped his fingers on his pants and took the wheel.

One, then two, then three—the bells of four clocks chimed. The moon looked like a block of ice in the leaden sky. A thin blue haze hung from the forehead of the hills, over the town. Not a breath of air. The sound of the water slapping the hull and the occasional gleam of a motor car's headlights was all that was heard or seen. A splash

and a flash of silver, another splash and the fish was gone.

A pig, with spray like beads on its bristles, wandered grunting down the decks, rubbing its greasy sides against the bulwarks, shoving its head into the galley, into the bucket and under the coils of rope. The helmsman watched it and kept still. It came round the deck-house champing a rotten potato and blinking its eyes. As it passed him he gave it a terrible kick in its side that sent it squealing up the deck, tripping over everything in its way. The man grinned and rubbed his instep.

Four strokes quivered in the cold sky. The stench of rotten fish and the nauseous smell of the hides and gasoline made a sickly mixture that hovered over the deck.

The roof of the deck-house, the ropes, the bulwarks and the mast were dotted with beads of dew as though they were sweating. An empty box drifted by, then the body of a dead dog, its sides swollen with water and gas. The captain came up from below and went to the side, remarking over his shoulder that from the look of the sky the wind would rise with morning; and, tightening his belt, disappeared down the black hatchway. The shrill clarion of a cock echoed from the land and

the five strokes of five o'clock followed.

The moon was tarnishing, the stars dwindling. The pallid sky flushed flesh-pink, growing deeper and deeper, a strip of violet and another of gold. A faint breath from the shore whispered the approach of dawn.

The infant began to whimper. The woman started, threw off the blanket, rubbed her eyes and looked around. She tried to quiet the crying child. She pushed her hand into her bosom and pulled out her right breast tipped with jet and bursting with milk. The baby stopped crying. The man moved, opened his eyes, looked at the sky, but did not dare to get up.

In the light of the dawn, four fishing boats with their triangular sails of flour bags bobbed up and down making for the shore, each with a man's feet on the gunwale, leaning out over the water holding on to a length of knotted rope fastened to the masthead to keep it upright against the strength of the freshening breeze. The chug-chug of a steam tug filled the air as the black mass detached itself from the crowd of boats and headed for the shipping, towing two bumboats laden with or-

anges, bananas, pineapples and parrots.

A flag ran up from the signal station and unfurled itself. The white fort on the hill, the church steeple next to it, the little houses dotting its sides, the clothes spread out on the bushes to bleach, became clearer and clearer in the transparent light. A train whistled and moved slowly over the lines among the coal-heaps with its trail of molasses tanks. Men working the cranes were unloading the lighters alongside the wharf. A stream of others came and went from the piers to the warehouses, pushing handtrucks with boxes, barrels, bales and bags. The helmsman made a last tack running past the cluster of vessels waving their masts in the air, doubled again and edged in between two two-masters. A ruffle of sheets and the anchor went overboard with a splash.

The woman pulled her breast away from the mouth of the child, wiped the saliva off the nippie, tucked it into her bodice and straightened her clothes. The man sat up with an effort, fixed his tie, looked for his papers in his pocket and waited for the customs officer to come aboard.

# Black Paris

ESLANDA GOODE ROBESON

## II

Paulette Nardal is beautiful. Her lovely clear dark-brown skin has bronze lights in it; her face is full of intelligence and repose; her voice is low and soft, cultured and controlled, and her diction faultless. She is equally fluent in French, her mother tongue, and in English. She has poise and charm. She carries herself with quiet unselfconscious dignity like some magnificent dusky queen.

She was born in Francois, a small village in Martinique, October 12, 1896. Her father was, and is, the most important Negro on the island. He was born at St. Pierre (destroyed by volcano in 1906), and was one of the first Negroes to go to France to study engineering. He specialized in construction engineering at Chalons-Sur-Marne, a well known technical school near Paris, and after completing his studies, returned to Francois; he worked as construction engineer there and in other places for fifteen years, after which time, because of his brilliant efficiency, the Government unofficially appointed him manager of the whole service on the island. The Department of Highways and Bridges was understood to have a manager, he did the

work and received the salary for more than sixteen years, and was then honourably retired by the Government; but the Government never formally recognized his position, even though the Legislature (made up of Negro representatives elected by the people) tried hard to have him officially appointed. It is said, had he been a mulatto, the Government would probably have appointed him; but being a pure Negro, they considered it bad policy for him to hold such a position. This question of mulattoes is a most unfortunate one; the white people feel much less prejudice against them and in consequence they usually secure the best positions in the Civil Services. They have quite a different psychology, too: they are primarily interested in becoming white, and in being assimilated. The pure Negroes are very proud, and resentful of this.

Paulette's mother, Louise Achille, was a Government teacher of the piano. She studied with the local teacher, and later with one of the great pianists of the day, who visited the island. She never went to France. Her father, M. Achille, came from Gaudeloupe to live in Martinique; he gave strict atten-

tion to the education of all his children, who were known throughout the island for their intelligence and good breeding, and who belong to the aristocracy of the Antilles.

Miss Nardal was interesting and illuminating on the subject of the bringing up of Negro children in the Antilles: All Negro Martiniquan families come from slaves, but are really remarkable for their adaptability; grandfathers are workmen, but grandchildren become teachers, engineers, doctors, etc. The children are brought up as though they had fifty years of tradition behind them, and from social and moral points of view are superior to the children in France in the same condition; the Martinique children are brought up as grand bourgeois, as in wealthy French families; while they are at home they want for nothing, and do no work; but alas, when they leave home they have no money, and they have no dowries. It is almost impossible for Negroes to accumulate money, because all the land in Martinique belongs to the white plantation owners; the peasants, Negroes, are merely workmen, civil officers, and a few have small unimportant businesses. There are two or three wealthy colored men in the whole of Martinique; there are about thirty white families, each of which is worth at least six or eight million francs,

some worth twenty to fifty million.

Until nearly twenty years ago, the Negro girls in Martinique did not work, but remained at home and waited for a husband. Paulette and her sisters were the first to go to France to study and win degrees, in order to qualify for Government positions, teaching, and other work. They did not have a happy time in Paris. There are usually about two hundred and fifty Negro students in Paris, mostly boys from Guadeloupe, Martinique, Africa, and a very few from America. The Negro boys often have great success, and are sometimes lionized by the French girls; the mulatto is often successful, too. But the Negro girls of the better class, often proud and sensitive, have a difficult time; their own boys are much more interested in making conquests in the new field, and leave them sadly alone; and French boys are not interested in them, except as friends.

Mlle. Nardal says that no bourgeois French family would ever consent to white children marrying Negroes; Negro husbands and white wives are not received by bourgeois families in France, it is impossible. French families of the upper classes, intelligent and artistic, accept special Negro friends, and cannot understand the prejudice of others; but the lower middle class, the petitbour-

geois, is terribly prejudiced. Negro boys who mingle with white people in France usually marry beneath them.

Paulette Nardal graduated from the Colonial College for Girls in Martinique, went to the British West Indies to perfect her English, and then went to Paris, to the Sorbonne (having won a competitive scholarship), where she specialized in English and French literature and languages. After winning her degrees, she returned and taught English for a year in Martinique.

But she could not bear the provincial atmosphere, and returned to Paris to live, and became a journalist. She contributed to *Le Soir*, *La Depeche Africaine*, and other newspapers and magazines, and finally helped to inaugurate *La Revue du Monde Noir*. Among her contributions to leading French newspapers were a series of articles on the Antillean Girl, a series on Negro Art, a series on Colonial Questions, and many short stories. The Governments of Martinique and Guadeloupe commissioned her to prepare the "Guide des Colonies Francaises," which is now used to attract tourists.

Mlle. Nardal has three sisters: Alice, a professor of music; Jane, a brilliant classical student with degrees in Latin and Greek, from Sorbonne, now teaching Latin in the Basse-berre Lycee

in Guadeloupe; Cecyl, a licensed midwife, now practising in Guadeloupe with Jane's husband, who is a doctor. Midwifery is very important in France, and the State examinations for licenses are very difficult. It is extremely important in the Antilles, where women usually prefer midwives to doctors.

Paulette Nardal is happy with her work in Paris, and is enthusiastic about her most interesting venture with Dr. Sajous,—the establishment and maintenance of *La Revue du Monde Noir*, the unique and fascinating Negro magazine which is published monthly at their offices at 45 Rue Jacob, Paris 6. Dr. Sajous is Directeur, and Mlle. Nardal is the General Secretary.

It was Dr. Sajous's idea originally. He had noticed that there was very little community of tastes between Negroes of different nations, and in different parts of the world; he felt if he could found a common journal of some kind, to include all sorts of articles, scientific, literary, geographical, etc., and a correspondence page on which all kinds of questions from Negroes everywhere could be answered, it would help draw Negroes all over the world together. The only forbidden subject, the only taboo, is politics, because it is dangerous.

Dr. Sajous and Mlle. Nardal felt that if Negroes everywhere would

read this magazine and contribute to it, the great barrier of isolation would be to some extent removed, and they would begin to be consolidated, at least from an intellectual point of view.

This is a profoundly interesting and important idea. The average French Negro has no idea that there are important men and important work in Negro art in America. In Martinique the Negroes think all American Negroes are prize-fighters, because a prize-fighter once visited the Antilles; they know nothing of Negro art and Negro music in America. The Negroes from the French West Indies (Antillean) dislike African Negroes because they have an old-

er civilization; cultured Antilleans are often sent to Africa as civil servants by the French Government, and there find themselves in an extremely delicate and difficult position: the white colonists look down on them, and the natives don't want to look up to them and obey their orders.

The first issue of *La Revue du Monde Noir* appeared in 1931, and it has appeared every month since then. Mlle. Nardal collects, composes, arranges and edits the material, which is printed in both French and English. It was very favorably reviewed by the French press, and is gradually beginning to interest Negroes everywhere.

—o::o—

## He Is Two-Thirds The Size of You, Charles Ford

PARKER TYLER

And in the first line I would speak of how  
Since it is breathless (how) the second breath  
Is stolen by the marionette, whose brow  
Is pink, whose cheeks are pink, whose lips are death:  
Orlando Furioso, breast of gold  
And joints of awesome majesty.  
His clank is younger than the clock and old-  
Er than the boy there watching, who would be  
Orlando Furioso of the street,  
And shake his enemy apart as much  
With words as swords sung to the lovely bleat  
Of his strong father (speaker) who has such  
A crimson mouth, but cannot kill so many  
As Furioso, best-looking guy of any.

# Gesture

PAUL TREMAINE

Clouds of dust spun skyward in swirls of fury, behind the speeding automobile, going north on the desert highway. It hovered an instant and then settled slowly over the terrain as it had been doing for countless ages. The highway wound in and out among the rocky bluffs and deep gullies, to end somewhere out of sight in the distant mountains. The auto soon disappeared beyond that last tiny line that marked the end of the road, to the seeing eye. Once more it was quiet and still along the Hassayampa river road in the Arizona desert.

A hundred feet or so from the highway, in a clump of bushes, that afforded shade from the hot sun, a young man lay flat on his back gazing up into the dusty skies. The noise of the roaring motor had wakened him. He listened intently for a moment to determine the direction taken by the automobile, then yawning and stretching luxuriously, sat up grinning, and said aloud, "Well old man, better be getting out on that highway and thumbing yourself a ride or else . . . ?" He studied the sun and the skies a little while and decided it must be about four o'clock.

Searching thru his pockets for

a cigarette, he found the butt of one he had smoked the night before. Carefully he smoothed it out with his fingers, put it between his lips and searched again for a match. At last he had a light. There were not more than two or three drags left in the short butt, but he inhaled deeply and let the smoke out thru his nostrils slowly with a sigh of deep satisfaction. His eyes roved slowly around his immediate tiny horizon, and a grin of appreciation stole slowly over his boyish countenance as he drank in the strange beauty of the desert.

A bee droned noisily above him. A grey bit of bird chirped tonelessly somewhere in a mosquito clump. A tiny lizard crawled out on a small dead limb and blinked at him in unwavering study. The cigarette burned his fingers and he quickly flipped it away. The suddenness of his movement frightened the lizard and it scuttled away with a great noise for so small an animal. The man threw back his head and laughed loud and heartily. He was amused.

Suddenly he stopped laughing. He spied an old desert cow and calf standing near in some bushes eyeing him curiously. Soberly

the old cow's jaw moved in continuous chewing on her cud, her eyes unblinking as she stared at the man. The calf stood close to its mother with lifted head, as if trying to satisfy its own small-brained curiosity. The man studied them in silent amusement, then laughed loudly, frightening the cow, who suddenly broke into a fast lope, with the calf running close beside her. She looked back once or twice, but the sound of the man's continued laughter seemed to make her run faster. They disappeared beyond a fringe of bushes and desert growth along the river. Once more the man was alone, and now even the tiny noises were stilled.

His face sobered. Anxiously he listened again with his ears to the earth, then quickly got to his feet, looked down at his dusty blue serge, and flicked the dust carelessly with his hands before stepping out to the highway to hail the car he had heard. Desert dust brushes off easily. He did not look like a fellow who had been out in the desert most all night nor like one who had slept on the ground most of the hot hours of the day. His shoulders squared as he walked.

The night before he had ridden out from Phoenix with a fellow who had turned off some-

where back down the road. So he had walked on, stopping now and then to sit on a rock and smoke. Daylight had come and with it no rides with friendly motorists. When it had become too hot he had found the shade of the bushes and slept as comfortably as if he had been in a hotel.

The motor he had heard coming turned out to be a stage. It bore down upon him rapidly. He stepped out of the road to watch it go past. Passengers turned to stare at the lonely fellow in the middle of the desert. Some of them waved and he waved back, muttering, "Why in the world do people always wave and grin at a fellow walking when they are riding." He laughed deep in his throat as he watched the stage move out of sight on the winding road. Then he turned and looked back south a long time. No other car was coming. He faced north and began walking. His steps were slow and careless. He might have been any man strolling in a city park.

As he walked he began to recite a few lines to himself and to the silence of the desert at large.

"Strange about thuh desert—how it sorta gits a man  
Thuh rusty, dusty desert wheh no rivahs evuh ran  
Thuh eart' so hot below yuh, thuh hot blue skies above,  
A funny sort of country for a man to learn to love."

He didn't know about those lines; whether he had read them somewhere long before, or whether he had made them up in his own mind as he thought and walked. A roaring motor coming from behind him stopped his reciting. He looked back. A large shiny car was coming, and a horse looked at him from a trailer hauled behind. He stood one side, ready to hail the car for a ride. It neared, and he waved his hand politely. The car didn't slow down. The cowboy driver looked a bit guilty as he passed by but the lone woman passenger in the rear seat ignored the man in the road. Only the horse looked over his shoulder curiously as they passed. In a cloud of dust, they were gone. The man in the road cursed as they disappeared. "Goddam such lowdown stingy scared to death people. Great, big empty car and wouldn't give me a ride."

His anger passed and he grinned. "What to hell," he chided himself. "It is their car. ain't it? They don't have to give a bum a ride if they don't want to. A good hombre will come along any time anyway!"

Far ahead up the road he saw the car top a rise, the trailer with the horse bobbing after them. Then they passed out of sight. He shrugged his shoulders carelessly and dismissed

them from his mind. Once again his thoughts returned to the poem he had been reciting.

"Yuh have t' learn t' love thuh desert for at first yuh hate it all—  
Thuh cactus and the sage brush and  
the sands where lizards crawl—"

He stopped reciting, searched for a smoke again, and not finding one, walked on, up one rise and down thru a gully, and then up another long rise, climbing easily and unhurriedly. He halted and stared as he topped the rise. A little way below him the shiny car with the trailer had stopped. The cowboy driver was out and kneeling beside a rear wheel. The man grinned and walked carelessly toward the car, stopping first at the horse and looking him over admiringly. The two people were unaware that he had neared them, and not until he had spoken did either of them look up.

"Cowboy," he said, "I reckon you could shoe a hoss much handier than you can fix that tire?"

The cowboy looked up at him, grinning. "Sure could, stranger. Never did fix one of these no-how. I gotta fix one tho this time. We aint got no more spares. Been having lots of tire trouble."

The woman stared coldly at the newcomer, her eyes pale and unfriendly. For a second the man looked into her eyes just as coldly. Then he said to the cowboy,

"All right, Buddy, you sit on that rock, and I'll fix it for you."

He took his coat off and flung it over the side of the car, then knelt and expertly removed the tire from the rim. He yanked the tube out, and walking over to a rock, began to patch the hole with the repair kit he had picked up from the running board.

The cowboy rolled a cigarette and smoked, eyeing the stranger with a knowing expression in his eyes. The woman smoked and watched also. In a very few minutes the man had the tire back on the rim. "There yuh are, cowboy, pump it up. I'll take the makin's while you're doing it. I'm plumb out of smokes."

The cowboy handed the sack of tobacco and papers over to him and went to work on the pumping business. Soon the tools were in the car, and they were ready to travel once more.

The tramp took his coat from the car door, saying, "That sure is a fine looking hoss to be bringing out in this country. Bet my shoes he's a long way from where he was born." He turned to the horse and said, "Old fellow, you sure are going to miss that bluegrass out here."

The woman was studying him closely. Now she asked, "What are you doing way out here

alone in the middle of the desert?"

The fellow grinned. The cowboy turned and looked soberly. "I was walking, mam. Slept out here most all day." He looked toward dark mountains. "Walking to Prescott."

The woman asked, "Don't you want to ride with us? We are going to Prescott."

The fellow smiled oddly, and shook his head, "No mam, I don't want to ride. I'll walk."

Her voice was tense with surprise. "It's getting dark already. The sun is going down. You'll be out here all night!"

"I know it, mam. I like it in the desert at night."

"Why don't you want a ride now?" she demanded. "You hailed us for one back there."

"Oh did I? Well, I must have changed my mind."

He looked into her eyes with a cold smile.

"Can I pay you for fixing my tire for me?" she asked indifferently as she picked up her purse.

He shook his head. "You don't owe me nothing, mam. You understand, courtesy of the road. We're in the west now."

Curtly she ordered the grinning cowboy to drive on. Her face settled into haughty indifference as she stared straight ahead toward the distant mountains. The cowboy started the motor and shifted slowly, look-

ing around and winking slyly at the vagabond as the car moved away. His left hand dropped over the side of the car and a sack of tobacco and papers slipped through his fingers to the road.

Like a graven image the man stood and watched the car and horse pass out of sight again. Then once more he began to walk and recite,

"Yuh come t' find it beautiful 'n'  
glorious and grand  
With its colors splashed regardless  
by some giant's careless hand."

He shivered and walked faster, drawing his coat closer around him. The sun had gone down behind the western hills. The coolness of the desert night

was rolling down from the darkening hills. He walked faster as he recited,

"Yuh come to love thuh desert where  
the air is crystal like and clear  
Where the stars come down at night  
time sorta friendly like and near."

He shivered again and pulled his collar higher, shoving his hands deeper into his pockets and walking faster.

Far ahead in the mountains he could hear the echoing of a roaring motor as it labored up some steep grade. He stared at the darkness approaching from the mountain side, then swore an oath and raised a heel of his shoe hard into the seat of his trousers.

"Damn, damn fool," he muttered.



# Duppy Philosophy of The Jamaican Peasant

LOUIS G. SUTHERLAND

When death makes its final round, leaving mortal man humbled at the close of the dismal struggle, what is the final destiny of man and where does he go? Is life's acrimonious ending the commencement of a platitudinous existence into which he is helplessly and irrevocably thrown? Is man the victim of a scheme divinely ordained and orderly controlled? Does death carry with it a finality, completely eradicating man's memory from the unkept records of the universe?

These and countless similar queries have continued baffling the most learned priest along with the pauper from the days when Egyptian soothsayers, with their heads swathed in purple bandannas, squatted around rising clouds of incense, conjecturing upon the immortality of the soul, down to the present day when robed theologians evolve man's ancestors from the lowly amoeba, and speculate judiciously upon the unfathomable mysteries that crowd the lonesome, unbeaten path in his silent journey to the grave.

But although these troublesome questions have been ponderable,

they still remain inscrutably, leaving ordinary man to ponder the imaginings of his own mind, or to satisfy his own soul with the speculative views of those who claim celestial wisdom to enter and interpret the secret and impenetratable ways of the Almighty!

Not so with the Negro peasants of Jamaica. They depend upon neither the theologian nor the sage, nor do they trust the priest to guide their minds into the strange, mysterious vicissitudes of a future life. For the peasants, from the depth of their simplicity and credulity see the earth as a shifting stage upon which man performs. After death the performance continues, but alas! its continuity becomes symbolic and portentous and is swiftly changed from the narrow confines of friends and family circle into the larger sphere of trees, animals and the elements. Hence the peasants see about them a world full of spirits, all active in an invisible drama apart from man but not far from him.

These things from the earliest times have constituted a vital part of the Negroes' belief. They formed a part of his early spirit-

ual and intellectual equipment which did not suddenly die with his transplantation into the world of the white man; their roots penetrated deeply into the soil of his soul and they furnished him with a subtle philosophy which alone removed the fear of death, and satisfactorily explained the riddles of a future life. To these beliefs the Negro persistently clung throughout his benighted days in slavery. They afforded him the consolation that, whether in the form of a three-legged horse that gallops furtively about the slumbering village at midnight, a cat mewing ominously in the grave-yard, or a rolling-calf lying sleepily by some abandoned roadside, his loved ones, while disguised and invisible, are forever lurking near. . . . Dark and foreboding, no doubt, but nevertheless, gloriously comforting!

According to these traditional beliefs, since mankind in life is grouped into two classes, good and bad, so, after death must there also be two kinds of spirits. This classification depends primarily upon the deeds done in the body, whether one's life was guided by the church or whether one was counted amongst the wayward and despicable village outcasts.

On the third day after a good man dies, his soul (spirit) forsakes its temporary terrestrial encasement, and is borne with incalculable swiftness up to Paradise,

where it receives a welcoming reception by an awaiting assemblage of rejoicing saints, all glowing with beaming countenance, before it is solemnly admitted into the presence of the "Blessed, Redeemed and Holy One".

In Paradise, attended by ministering angels, it has the indescribable pleasure of feasting upon delicacies, far above the means of an earthly life. But since "there is a time for everything under the sun", the time arrives when not even this paradisaical existence can longer restrain the roaming spirit of a terrestrial inhabitant, for there are things earthly which even a blessed saint enjoys; so with solemn parting amid flowing tears and holy embraces, the good soul assumes an intangible, but its identical, earthly form, and again descends to earth to roam amongst the living.

The wicked is never so well favored; his spirit never enters Paradise; it never even leaves the earth; but at the resurrection which occurs also on the third day after death, it commences its old frivolities; moving aimlessly from place to place, haunting deserted homes, scaring timid souls, and imitating the living. It is the ghost of the perverse person who remains untransformed by death that the peasants dread. They believe that a good soul is always harmless; but an evil spirit, like

the rogue it represents, is an everlasting menace.

\* \* \* \* \*

The peasants implicitly believe that at midnight on the third day after death, one's spirit, like Jesus, is resurrected and forthwith hastens home. The resurrection can be observed by any one taking the necessary precaution of quietly making his way to the cemetery some time before the phenomenon occurs and, at a suitable distance from the grave, quietly secluding himself in a high tree. (Duppies do not look upward immediately after rising). With nervous satisfaction he can view from this vantage point the entire proceedings at the grave.

It is reported that the preliminaries preceding the triumph of the spirit over death and the grave are exceedingly touching. Before the ghost emerges a white cloud of smoke, with incalculably swiftness gushes from a hole in the grave and curls spirally upward; then immediately following, the shadowy human form comes forth, clothed in white burial robes. But until now, death had been only an unconscious sleep, the dead perfectly oblivious of passing events. Now suddenly finding itself removed from all cares in this earthly life, it sighs in deep, mournful tones, then with reverently bowed head, circles the grave three times and disappears.

Following this spectacular men-

euver at the grave the ghost hastily departs for its former home where it gathers the shadows of its belongings, and by understandable signs, counsels close relatives that all is well on the other side. From that time on it becomes a creditable and acceptable member of the invisible world.

On the night of the resurrection the cautious villager hastens his footsteps home before the curtains of night settle over the village, for it is certain that the newly resurrected, accompanied by a welcoming procession of vagabond ghosts, as a celebration in the spirit world, will invade the village, parading far into the night; and no sane person risks encountering such a ghostly train; they are fleet on foot, breathe fire, and carry destruction in their wake!

Sometimes they appropriate the form of three-legged horses and domestic animals; but often they retain part of their human shape, and long-legged and headless, dance in the air several feet above ground!

It has proved impossible to elicit the complete story from a country peasant who claims to have encountered such a procession. All he remembers is that his head instantly 'swell big' and his next recollection came when he pulled up breathless, in front of his hut!

Ghosts are possessed with the miraculous power of assuming va-

rious animal and reptile forms. They can, at will, transform themselves into lizards that glide up and down the trunks of trees or scurry through the graveyard; they can assume the form of birds, hopping nonchantly from branch to branch; they delight in wandering about the countryside, as the famous "whooping boy".

The "whooping boy" is characterized by its name. It is the spirit of the man or boy who, with a flavor for mischief, rambles the countryside naked and imitates people, particularly the shepherd and herdsmen. Its activities are nocturnal, and it wanders amongst cattle with a long whip in its left hand, rounding them up by nearby ponds, lakes or streams. They have been heard wailing, and even seen in the actual performance of beating cows. Any indication of cows herding together during the night by a watering place is supportable evidence in the mind of the Jamaica peasants that supernatural beings have attended them.

The peasants believe implicitly that duppies have friendly dealings with cows. A bull grazing alone on a plain or savannah is usually ridden by a "whooping boy"; at noonday when cows chew their cud in the cool shadows of spreading trees, duppies are present and it is dangerous to throw stones. While cows do not themselves become ghosts, they are able

to detect their presence, and when spirits or other psychic forces are near they become unmanageable. The dog will whine, the sheep gets nervous, while the cow becomes restless and excitable. Many peasants believe that cows can communicate with spirits, and likewise reveal secrets to their masters. It is known where the tongue of cows have been severed by some culprit, fearing that the beasts would, in some mysterious way, communicate his misdeeds to his master. Thus runs the Jamaica proverb: "No fe want o' tongue mek cow no ta'k".

The wickedest, the most malignant, consequently the most dreaded of Jamaica ghosts, is the "rolling calf". It is bold, daring and malicious. Rolling calves are supposedly spirits of bad people, and every country peasant knows numerous stories about their jaunts. About the shape and size of calves, plump and sleek, with long spotted tails that curl sedately upon their backs, they carry balls of jiggling chains around their necks; their eyes glow in the dark like balls of fire, and like Puck, they "grow monstrous with the solitude".

One dunpy of peculiar interest in Jamaica is Long-Bubby Susan, analagous to "Old Hige" of European fame. With long breasts reaching to the ground, she wanders aimlessly among the mountain solitude, wailing. Women and children are safe from her

snares; but men travelling alone along mountain paths, she will unhesitatingly kidnap, and dash for her retreat in underground caves. There is a corresponding belief prevalent in Martinique, of the DIABLESEE, an enchanting Negro woman with piercing eyes who promenades the woods and cane fields; whatever man she smiles upon is compelled to arise and silently follow her, and is never seen again.

Most of the adventurous tales about Jamaica ghosts center about the rolling calf, because of its reputation for roaming the countryside and indulging in all sorts of troublesome pranks. Having an inherent fondness to metamorphose into other creatures, and being the very incarnation of indolent village characters, it indulges freely in all sorts of mischief, going so far as to breathe hot air upon the living, thereby precipitating violent fever.

\* \* \* \* \*

Obviously, if the Negro is to survive in an environment literally swarming with supernatural beings, all bent upon mischief, he must necessarily devise some means of effectively combatting their truculent designs, learn their ways and habits, and honorably use these for his own preservation, since he is always thrown on the defensive. And happily, after four hundred years of this unceasing struggle, the Negro has

evolved a vast system of self-defense, a system so efficient that his defensive mechanism is immediately thrown into systematic functioning when there is ocular or imaginary proof that duppies are about. The defense might loom as: incantations and frantic ejaculations with head and hands, calling upon God: "Jesus the name high over all", and these failing, taking to the heels.

But there are innumerable other ways whereby ghosts can be made to depart. Any decent ghost can be shamed into leaving you. When a woman is certain that she is being accompanied by an apparition, she might simply throw her dress over her head, and the ghost will depart; a man might also rid himself of his unwelcome companion by leaving his clothes unfastened. In the South superstitious Negroes wore match sticks behind their ears to keep away ghosts. In Jamaica a burnt match stick is also placed behind the ear.

Even though you might not be gifted in seeing apparitions, you can shoot them; but shooting spirits is a dangerous venture for they are able to reverse the shots back upon you. Upon hearing a suspicious sound, point the stock of the gun in the direction from which the noise came. The ghost will laugh, thinking that you are only playing; then quickly reverse the barrel and fire, providing you

have previously placed grains of salt in the muzzle. The ghost will be found in the form of a dead green lizard.

If one's name is called out at night, it is dangerous to answer, without first seeing the caller, until after the third call. The explanation lies in the belief that duppies are extremely poor mathematicians; they cannot count above three, so upon reaching this magic number they must begin counting all over again. When ghosts count they say: One. . . two. . . t'ree. . . an' dis. Upon this belief peasants who must travel late at night invariably carry rice in their pockets which serves a two-fold purpose; first, duppies are extremely fond of rice and will never pass it up; second, being poor mathematicians, a handful of scattered rice will keep them searching and counting the remainder of the night. But in the meantime one should be careful of one's own thoughts, for while the living cannot read the thoughts of the dead, ghosts can readily read what the living are thinking about.

Yet there are many other means of protecting one's self from the malicious intent of ghosts. One might simply repeat the little rhyme: "By St. Peter, By St. Paul, By the living God of all"; or if one remembers one's Bible, one might quote verses of scripture, and in the event of all these failing, turn to profane language. This combin-

ation, which offhand seems shocking, has never been satisfactorily explained, but it appears that, as duppies would not expect a sinner to quote scripture, nor a christian to be profane, they are willing to accept either alternative.

The drug stores (dispensaries in Jamaica) supply the peasants with ingredients as protection against evil spirits, hence they contribute directly to this superstition. Although the druggists do not advertise their wares as such, superstitious peasant folk find no difficulty in believing that anything possessing an unpleasant odor or technical name must be very efficacious as protection against evil. Many druggists have their hearty chuckle after their unsuspicious customer departs, happy in the possession of his "oil of juniper," "oil of frankincense," assafoetida, "oil of turn-back," "oil of dead man's skin."

Ghosts are afraid of the moon. Hence one need not fear on nights when that orb floats. Should duppies venture out on a moonlight night they walk with their face upward, gazing steadfastly at the moon, fearing less it fall from the sky. There is an old story of a Brown's Town farmer who almost bumped into a ghost that had ventured out while the moon was full; the apparition was dancing along the road, eyes upward, imploring the moon: "do me goody moon, don' you fall do'n 'pon me."

According to the peasants, duppies have an incurable weakness for perfume, and for rum and other strong drinks. It is believed that if a man sleeps intoxicated in the open, ghosts will pump the liquor through his nose, which accounts for his soberness the next morning! A little rum from a newly opened bottle is invariably poured through the window "fe de fam'ly," and rum is freely used while digging graves, starting a new field, commencing a house, cutting down trees in a graveyard, and at almost all ceremonies.

Ghosts, like human beings, have their permanent rendezvous to which they return after aimless wanderings. Among their favorite haunts are the cemetery, between the spurs of the giant silk cotton trees (*Bombax Ceiba*) and caves—to which they often take their loot of bones, rags, feathers of chickens and birds, kidnapped children—and abandoned houses.

The most famous haunted house in Jamaica is Old Rose Hall mansion, near the town of Montego Bay. This building was constructed in 1760 of the finest materials procurable in those days, and reputed to be one of the most magnificent palaces in all the West Indies. Yet it is closed today, and practically abandoned, although in a fair state of preservation, simply because it is haunted by the ghost of its owner, Mrs. Rose Palmer. This woman, an Irish

immigrant, was rich, cruel, eccentric and immoral. She killed two husbands, married a third and wore a ring with the imprint: "I shall have a fourth." But she did not survive the third, for one morning she was found dead in her room, said to have been the work of one of her slaves, of whom she possessed over 900. Today her ghost haunts the mansion, and no one will occupy it; at night sinister noises leap from the windows, and queer, ominous sounds echo through the walls, and at times the wailing voice of a woman moves up and down the old avenue of trees that lead to the palace. The house has become a shrine, of interest to tourists for its connection with slavery and for its reputation of being haunted.

The classic touch to all this duppy philosophy in Jamaica is added by the Seventh Day Adventists, a religious sect, who propose an explanation for all psychic phenomena. They admit that there are spirits, but insist that they are only "wandering spirits", the spirits of devils—fallen angels who were once loyal in heaven, but became dissatisfied over something or another, "sin" entering into their stubborn hearts. As a result, God kicked them out and cast them upon this old earth. They quote from the 16th chapter of Revelation: "For they are spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of

the earth and of the whole world". For how, say they, could one be fooling around upon this earth a few days after death, whereas a man is not risen from the dead until the resurrection . . . . when Jesus himself returns to the earth

to execute judgment upon the world and gather the faithful home? Adventists are not supposed to be afraid of ghosts because they believe them to be "fallen angels" trying to deceive the very "elect".

:-o:-

## Futility

NAN BOSTON

As I lie here,  
I can see through the crook,  
Between your shoulder and your head,  
Three rounded slender trees,  
Leaning, dark-soft, against a moonless olive sky;  
And all about them,  
Swirling, wreathing, breathtakingly lovely,  
Myriads of tiny fire-fly lamps  
Winking in, winking out — winking in, winking out.  
Strange, how cool my eyes upon this beauty,  
How cool my mind,  
How cool, too, this unpredictable body of mine;  
Although, all the while,  
Against my face, my throat, my breast,  
Your dark, soft, little kisses brush and flutter,  
Timid, pathetic, hungry,  
Blind fire-fly kisses,  
Always skirting my lips,  
Begging, begging —.  
God! How futile!  
All I can remember is another night,  
Another mouth.

# Sticks and Stones

MYRON A. MAHLER

The children wrestled in the grass. Their scissored legs uprooted pale goldenrod. Their lithe bodies trampled daisies underneath. Yesterday a woman had passed. She had looked at the flowers. She had said, "If I leave them they'll be trampled underneath. If I pick them they'll be dead before I reach home." She had given them their chance at life and now the children wrestled in the grass.

One child rose. He said, "Let's play something else"

"What else can we play"

"Cops and robbers"

"We played that yesterday"

"Let's play it again"

"No, besides you always want to be a robber"

"Cowboys and Indians?"

"No, you aways want to be a cowboy"

"Let's play war. You'll be the Germans and I'll ----"

"Naw"

Another child rose. He had big black eyes that shone in the sun.

"Let's visit the old woman"

Several heads blossomed in the grass. "No"

"You're afraid"

The flowers grew.

"It's not that. It's ---"

"You're afraid" The black eyes sparkled.

"So are you"

"I am not"

"Then why don't you go"

"I want to but I want company"

"You're afraid to go alone"

"I am not. There's nothing to be afraid of"

"She steals little children"

"How do you know" He picked a daisy and tore its petals.

"My mother told me"

"And how does she know"

"She knows"

One child said, "Let's play something"

"Let's visit the old woman"

"My mother says she gives the children poison and they fall asleep and she sends them away. My mother says I should never take anything from strangers"

"You're afraid"

"So are you"

"I am not"

"Then why don't you go"

He tore a piece of grass, placed it between his thumbs and blew against it. It whistled sharply.

He walked through the grass field disturbing the tall grass. A

cricket jumped in the air. He caught it, held its wings, then placed it in a buttoned pocket. It fluttered his shirt, chirped against his breast, then lay still.

Beyond him the earth cupped a lake. Below the lake a swift brook tumbled over mossed boulders. Once there had only been the brook below, but that was when the dam was rocks in the earth and sand by the sea. He skipped a stone on the water. It floated down to the stream below and the swift brook tumbled over it. He walked across the dam.

The old woman lived in a shroud. The tumbling brook tied the thick cover of trees wrapped around the house.

He crossed the planks drunk with the brook and walked along the pathless path. The house loomed black with patches of sunlight sewn on a dust black roof. His heart beat hard, disturbing the cricket in the buttoned pocket. It fluttered his shirt, chirped against his breast, then lay still.

He looked through the window. The room was dark. The table was sticks and planks. A black tan stool stood by a black black stove. A torn black gay colored rag rug hid the rough floor in spots. Deep in the corner rocked the old woman in a stationary black red rocker. His heart disturbed the cricket. She

rocked slowly, her thin hands clasping the arm of the chair. Her thin face dreaming in a dream of blackness.

He thought he had knocked on the door. No one came. He looked through the trees to the open field, then knocked again.

"Just a minute" he heard her voice, "just a minute" The door opened.

"Hello, little boy" she said leading him in.

"Hello"

She sat down on the rocker. The stool was tan. He sat down.

"It's nice of you to visit the old woman" she said.

"Uh huh" he looked around the room.

"What kind of a lamp is that?" he asked, "It has no wire"

"That's an oil lamp"

"We have an oil burner home. How does it work?"

She rose and lit the kerosene lamp. Then blew it out.

"Too much light hurts my eyes" she said.

"When my sister has company she turns the light out too. She says it's atmosphere"

The old woman laughed. "And what does your mother say?"

"My mother don't say nothing but my father always turns it on. He says a person should be able to see himself"

She rocked in her stationary red rocker.

"It must be nice to have a father and mother" she said.

"Haven't you?"

"No"

"Oh I'm sorry. Then you're an orphan?"

"Well - - -"

"I know another orphan. He goes to school with me. But he lives in a home"

He looked around the room. On the shelf was a bottled boat. He walked toward it and strained to look at it. She took it down for him.

"How'd it get in there?"

She smiled. "It's made in little pieces and they're all put together in the bottle"

"Why don't they make it first and put the bottle around it?"

"Maybe because it'd be too easy"

She put the boat back on the shelf and took down a jar.

"Have a cookie?" She opened the jar.

She steals little children, the boy had said. She gives the children poison and they fall asleep and she sends them away. His mother had told him so.

"Don't be bashful"

His mother had said he should never take anything from strangers.

"It'll spoil my supper" he said.

"One little cookie?"

"Yes, it'll spoil my supper"

"And I made them all myself. They've got cinnamon in them"

"It'll spoil my supper"

"You're not the little man I thought you were. A little man never refuses anything offered him. That's how they do in society" She was smiling.

"And in the movies"

"And in the movies"

She forwarded the jar.

He took one and began to smell it.

"They're fresh" she said, "I just made them"

"Oh I always do that. Like in the movies" his face was flushing "they smell whisky to see if there's poison in it"

And while he held the cake to his nose he ate it. It lay hot in his stomach like the time his father had let him taste whisky when his eyes ran water and his head floated on his flaming neck. But now his eyes were dry. They shone with dryness and his heavy head dangled on his neck. The red rocker was no longer stationary. It jumped besides the bottled boat. The tan stool turned somersaults and was no longer tan. It was crosses and checks till it was no stool, only crosses and checks.

He heard a violin playing, a soft mellow violin which came nearer and nearer. He opened his eyes. The bright fire absorbed the starlit sky and the

sky was black. The violinist pulled out a gay gypsy tune and the people danced. They were dressed in gay colors that licked the flames as they twirled about. They all danced but one. A little girl sat against a rock, her long straight blonde hair nested in the curves of her shoulders.

His heart beat hard disturbing the cricket.

"I knew you were coming" said the old woman, "that's why I didn't put poison in them"

He lowered the cookie to his mouth and bit it. The cricket chirped, "Kaydidid"

"A cricket" said the old woman

He swallowed the cookie slid down his throat.

"Kaydidid"

It slid and slid

"I wonder where the cricket is?"

Then melted.

"Kaydidid"

"Kaydidid"

It fluttered his shirt.

"Oh, the cricket" he said. He opened his pocket and took it out. He held its writhing green body between his fingers. He crushed one of its legs against his nail and tore off one of its wings between his fingers.

"What funny wings it has" he said

"Give it to me" said the old woman

He played with its feelers,

forcing them backwards and forward, and around in circles. He squeezed its writhing green body.

"Give me it"

He crushed another leg on his finger nail.

"Give me it" said the old woman

He brought it to her and laid it in her hand. She dropped it to the floor and stepped on it. Its hard back crackled under her foot.

She walked to the table.

"Have another cookie" she said

"No Thanks"

"Don't you like cookies?"

"I like them"

"Then have another one"

"I had one already"

"Have another anyway" She offered the jar.

"No Thank you"

"Don't you like them?"

"Yea, they're good"

"Then ---" She offered the jar. He took one.

"Thanks"

A little later he rose.

"I'll have to go now" he said

"Right away?"

"Yes, my mother doesn't know where I am"

"You should always tell your mother"

"That's why I have to go now"

He walked to the door. She opened it for him. Beyond the shroud he saw the sun. The

fields lay white in the sunlight.

"I must go now" he said

"Come again and see the old woman" she said

He began to walk down the pathless path.

"And tell your mother so you can stay longer"

He walked slowly through the tall grass, yellow without sunlight. He stood on the sponge

bridge. He turned his head. Her white head was like a patch of sunlight on a roof.

"Thanks for the cookie" he said

She waved to him.

"Come again, little boy and tell your mother so that you can stay longer."

He walked into the sunlight.

:-o:-

## The National Negro Congress

LOUIS EMANUEL MARTIN

At the Eighth Regiment Armory in the city of Chicago on the fourteenth of February of this year the first National Negro Congress officially opened, commemorative of the birth of Frederick Douglas who was born over a century ago. Hundreds of delegates from all sections of the country, were met to determine, discuss and debate the issues which seem to threaten the existence of colored people in America particularly, and in the world generally.

Oddly enough, the principal speakers scheduled for this solemn occasion failed, for one reason or another, to appear. The newspapers erroneously reported that they were frightened away by the "reds". The keynote speech, which was to have been

delivered by A. Phillip Randolph, was read from the platform and those who have heard Mr. Randolph felt his absence. His message, like the Congress itself, was an Olympian protest against racial injustice and an excoriating attack upon its infinite manifestations.

The real sound and fury, however, was only begun.

On Saturday, the following day, the vast floor of the Armory was jammed to capacity with nearly a thousand, determined, fiery-eyed delegates. From the walls hung huge banners with appropriate red letters setting forth the aims of the Congress: "Defend the Sharecroppers from Landlord Terror." "Defend Ethiopia from Fascist Invasion and Imperialism; Unite Against

War." "Black America Demands an End to Lynching, Mob Violence and Racial Persecution."

In the galleries and on the main floor small groups stood apart to discuss that aspect of racial injustice which most merited their individual bitterness. In one section a group grew uproarious over the question of Civil Liberties, in another there were frantic cries of "Down with Il Duce," and in other sections shrill tenor voices mingled with Baptist basses in demanding the end or damning the continuance of this or of some other form of racial discrimination.

The poor acoustics of the armory and the disadvantages of a single room for so many separate discussions inevitably led to great confusion. Unfortunately also, there were no signs indicating the nature of the debate in the several scattered sections and many, like myself, had to wander all over the armory in order to find the desired assembly. Despite these inconveniences, however, even the most callous could not escape the spirit and enthusiasm of those earnest, half-frenzied delegates.

Finally, by some magic of persistence, resolutions were drawn up by each section and, at the closing session on Sunday night, they were read and accepted with tremendous applause from the assembled body. This busi-

ness of the Congress having been completed, Norman Thomas, Angelo Herndon, Langston Hughes, Roy Wilkins and several others, made dramatic appeals to the vast audience and brought this first National Negro Congress to a formal close.

So much, shall we say, for the trappings.

Perhaps at this writing it is too soon to question the underlying significance of such a remarkable exhibition of fervor and enthusiasm over the liquidation of the social and economic problems which have become so vital to the welfare of colored peoples everywhere. There seem to be but two high roads upon which our social thinking is accustomed to travel—either radical or reactionary. If we were to label the Congress—and we shall do it whether we intend to or not—certainly we must say that for once at least "God's dark chillun" were "red" in spirit if nothing more. Some have even alleged, perhaps mistakenly, that the expenses of the Congress were underwritten by the Communist Party.

When it was announced at the closing session that Earl Browder, the head of the Communist Party in America, could not appear, there were loud boos and "bronx cheers" from the disappointed audience. The chairman apologized for his absence by re-

ferring to some "higher authority" which reminded the audience that they were on government property. The lesser fry among the Communists had already done a good job, and Norman Thomas tried in his short speech to say a daring thing or two.

There was plenty of evidence that the Congress was seeking a new race leadership. The old ballyhoo artists along with the gentlemen of the cloth were snubbed, according to the newspapers, and only the young Negroes were pressed to attend. DuBois, Woodson, Kelly Miller, James Weldon Johnson, R. R. Moton and Charles S. Johnson, all stayed at home while the "younger prigs went to market."

Whether this snubbing was deliberate or not we cannot say, but it is true that the old guard, including the preachers were conspicuously absent from what purported to be a National Congress and presumably representative of the best thinkers in the Negro race. Several of the well known prelates have loudly protested the whole affair. When DuBois was asked about it, he said, according to the newspapers, "Nothing of importance will be done." Still true to himself, he made the further observation, "Of course, those who attend will no doubt have a good time. I have never known a

group of Negroes to assemble that they didn't have a good time."

Nevertheless, however guilty of partial representation the Congress may have been, there was something wholesome and salutary about the brevity and dispatch with which the business of the Congress was conducted. One who is familiar with the long-winded harangues, the diamond-studded and soporific rhetoric of our highly touted prelates and philosophers would have appreciated their absence even if he was inclined to doubt the good sense of those who took their places.

In short, what can we say was accomplished?

Obviously, there was some value derived from the exchange of views by representatives from all sections of the country. Further, any effort to formulate a concerted program of action or of thought for a group so lacking in necessary solidarity is commendable no matter how feeble the effort. Thus, we must say that something was done, however little we might wish to consider it.

Moreover, preliminary steps for the creation of a permanent organization embodying the ideals of the Congress were taken, and another national assembly was planned for next year. Finally, the resolutions adopted

by the Congress were regarded as Gospels from which members of the race should take their living text in the hope that this land of rampant racial prejudice may be made a little less of a hell for those whose skins boast a bit of pigment.

Some indication of the tenor of these resolutions may be sought in those directed against the hostile press.

"WHEREAS: There is a section of the American press distinctly hostile to the interests of Ethiopia, therefore Be It Resolved: That this congress urge all Negroes and other Americans opposed to war and Fascism to refuse to purchase papers and publications of the Hearst and other sections of the hostile press, and be it further

RESOLVED: That a list of business firms advertising in the Hearst and other sections of the hostile press be made available and that Negroes and other opponents of war and Fascism be urged not to buy from such firms, and that they be urged to make known their reasons to such firms for not purchasing such goods."

According to the literary fashions of the day, perhaps at this point it would be fitting to debunk the Congress by an expose of the individual most responsible for its convocation, John P. Davis. Mr. Davis, without a doubt, is the gentleman upon whose head the bulk of the criticism as well as the praise will naturally fall. It was he who laid the groundwork for the Congress and determined the gen-

eral direction which it was to follow.

John Davis is a bright, round-faced, young man, short in stature and possibly a bit self-conscious about his ample waist line. He is vociferous and his actions reveal the abruptness of one who is sufficiently self-confident. With several degrees from the best universities and a keen interest in the socio-economic aspects of Negro life, he is adequately qualified to give the opinions which, according to report, he freely does.

According to still other reports, Mr. Davis has been mildly rebuffed by some of our so-called race leaders who do not share his general views with regard to the salvation of the race. Nevertheless, with unquestionable sincerity, he has undertaken to make his ideas prevail, unmindful, or at least undisturbed, by the cries of reaction emanating from the ranks of the old guard. Mr. Davis feels, like many young members of the race, that the time has come for a different type of Negro leadership and a different set of ideals and perhaps different methods of approximating them.

Finally, I feel that, despite the many objectional and unfortunate aspects of this first National Negro Congress, no one interested in the rise of black America can afford to underes-

timate the significance of the enthusiasm and sincerity revealed in this mass attempt to create a united front against all manifestations of racial prejudice.

It should be the right of every colored citizen to look forward to the day when it would be un-

true to say, as A. Phillip Randolph has said, that "Because Negroes are black, they are hated, maligned and spat upon, lynched, mobbed and murdered. Because Negroes are workers, they are brow-beaten, bullied, intimidated, robbed, exploited, jailed and shot down."

— :o : —

## Poem

LANGSTON HUGHES

Wandering in the dusk,  
Sometimes  
You get lost in the dusk—  
And sometimes not.

Beating your fists against the wall,  
Sometimes  
You break your bones  
Against the wall—  
But sometimes not.

Walls have been known  
To fall,  
Dusk  
Turn to dawn,  
Chains  
To be gone!

Keep on!

# The Five Dollar Bill

By MARY CHRISTOPHER

Judy could read before she was seven. Mother said that when she was four she could read the weather reports to her father. The only one she fell down on was the variable wind one. Only she didn't really fall down, for when she came to that difficult word and got it out somehow, the father caught her up in his arms and hugged and kissed her hard.

Judy loved the father. She did not know very much about him. She guessed he was her relative because they had the same name. She would have liked to know if this kinship were closer than an uncle; or was it like a grandfather, for the father was much older than mother, with the top of his head broken and wrinkles around his kind eyes.

But Judy was a shy child who did not like to ask questions, for either the grown-up people said, run and play, or gave you ridiculous answers with superior smiles.

Judy could answer the little questions herself. It was the big questions about babies and God, and telling a lie for your mother that grown-up people were never truthful about.

The stork did not bring babies. It was not true about a stork flying over clouds and dropping babies down chimneys. Santa Claus

could come down a chimney because he was a man and wouldn't get hurt. But would God let a stork drop a dear little baby down a dirty chimney?

No, a woman prayed God very hard for a baby. Then it began to grow in her stomach. When it was quite grown a doctor cut a hole in her side and the baby came out. After that the woman stayed in bed until the hole healed up. In that moment of the baby's birth the woman became a mother. But how a man became a father Judy did not know.

And about God: did He really punish people in a fire with a pitchfork? Did He stick them with the pitchfork *Himself*? Why Judy could not have hurt a fly. She could kill a mosquito all right because it was teenier. Sometimes though when you killed a mosquito a lot of blood squished out. That made your stomach feel queer for a minute. But then mother said beamingly, Got him good, didn't you darling, and everything was all right.

Mother could kill anything without feeling queer. She killed flies and ants and even big roaches, and put down traps for mice. She said anything that belonged outdoors should stay outdoors if it didn't want her to kill it. And she would

grab up a wad of paper and go banging at a fly, which was fun to watch if you did not think too hard about the fly's family.

God was supposed to be gooder than mother. God was not supposed to have mother's temper. Mother said damn and sometimes Goddamn. If Judy overheard she would frown and have a temper. She would say God damn to the father. Then she would have a temper when the father reproached her for saying such words before Judy.

They would begin the queer thing called quarreling. The words would fly between them and it would seem to Judy that her mother's words hit hardest. Yet at such times, as fond as she was of the father, she would want to run to her mother, saying protectively, there, there, my darling.

Judy often wondered if the father lived with them. She always went to bed while he was still sitting up, and he was never there in the morning like her mother. There were only two bedrooms, hers and her mother's. And once she had heard her mother say to the college man, Jim and I have not lived together as man and wife for months.

Mother was careless with money. She was always losing it. Judy never saw her lose it really, but she would tell Judy about it and after a while Judy would remember exactly how it happened.

When the father sat down to dinner, mother would tell him about it, too, adding, Judy remembers. Judy would say proudly, yes, mother.

Mother always lost the money on the day the college man came. Mother said he was poor and came to sell things to help him through college. She said Judy had better not tell the father because he was not a college man and got mad if anybody mentioned college men to him.

Judy did not know what the college man sold and she would not ask her mother. It always cost just what the father had left for the gas bill or the milk bill, and once even what the father had left for a birthday frock for Judy.

When the college man came, mother would let Judy take her dolly out in its carriage. But it would not be the same as on other days. She would dress her doll hurriedly, and it would not seem to be a real baby, but just an old doll. She would feel silly, and would just want to get away from the college man and his teasing voice.

Then one night the father and mother had a terrible quarrel about mother losing money. You could hear their voices all over the house, only this time it was the father's words hitting hardest. Neither Judy nor her mother had ever mentioned the college man to him, but he knew all about him

just the same, and called himself a fool and the college man a rat and said he was going to divorce mother and take Judy away from her.

Judy did not know what divorce meant, but when the father said he would take her away from her mother, she knew that as mad as he was he would take her for keeps, and never let them see each other.

She got out of bed and ran into the kitchen, and threw herself into her mother's arms. She was sobbing wildly and saying hysterical things. Her mother held her close and began to cry, too, saying, there there, my precious, just like Judy had always wanted to say to her.

After a long time she felt the father's hand on her head. She heard him say something about the child's sake, and knew he meant he would let her stay. All in a moment she fell asleep, with her hand sliding down her mother's soft cheek.

After that the father did not leave any more money for bills. The college man came once and said where was the money for his books. He looked very scornful while he said it, and he kept his hat in his hand.

Mother forgot about Judy and cried and clung to the college man. He pushed her away and said she knew where to reach him when she

had the money for his books. The outer door slammed after him.

Then Judy knew that the college man sold books and was mad because mother would not pay him. Still it was strange. She had never seen her mother so heartbroken. Even with the father it had not been like that. For she had never heard her proud mother plead. She had never seen her stalwart mother cling to anyone.

Judy had to say it. Give him back his old books.

Her mother stopped in the midst of a sob. You go and play, she said coldly.

After a while Judy almost forgot about the college man and the money her mother owed him. It was only when her mother walked up and down and around the room looking burningly beautiful, that Judy felt sick and afraid and saw the college man's image.

Then it was that Judy, who could read almost anything at seven, read in the Sunday supplement about the moving picture machine. You sent away for some reproductions of famous paintings. When they came you sold them. When you had sold them all you sent the money to Mr. Fisher in Chicago, and he sent you a moving picture machine. If you put up a sheet and charged a penny to all the children in the neighborhood once a week, pretty soon you'd have enough money to give your mother to pay that old

college man for his old books.

Judy talked it over with the father, except the part about the college man. He said he was proud of his little business woman and helped her write the letter to Mr. Fisher. He took her out and lifted her up to the mailbox so she could post it herself.

In less than a week the pictures came. The father said they were beautiful and made the first purchase himself. There were twenty to dispose of at a quarter apiece.

Judy sold one to her teacher, one to the barber who cut her hair, one to the corner grocer, at whose store they had an account, one to kind Mr. McCarthy who ran the poolroom, one to an uncle, one to an aunt, and two to company ladies. The father said she had done simply wonders and took the rest of the pictures to the office building, where he was superintendent, and sold them.

He brought her the money in silver. Judy was very excited. She counted out her money and wanted to have all changed to a five dollar bill.

Mother got up and said she would take Judy to the corner grocer's right now. And tomorrow they would go to the Post Office where Judy was to send the money order herself.

Mother held out her hand and was radiant. Judy slipped her small palm into hers. They smiled at each other and shut out the

male, their husband and father. In this moment Judy was saying, It is for your sake, my darling. Her mother's mounting excitement answered, I know it, my sweet, my precious.

They went to the corner grocer's, still holding hands. Judy skipped along. It was seven o'clock of a winter's evening. The stars were shining. The snow crunched under her feet. Everything was dear and familiar, the car line, the icicles on the cables, the signboards with their bright illustrations luminous under the electric lights, the vacant lot with the snowmen silent and stout, the fire alarm, the post box. All things good, and best of all her mother's bright and beautiful face, her mother's parted red-lipped mouth, with her breath on the winter night.

The corner grocer rang up No Sale and gave Judy a five dollar bill. Judy said, You take it for me, mommy, with the same indulgence that mothers use in saying to small children, you may carry the package, dear.

Mother opened her purse and fished around in it. After a while she looked her amused surprise at Mr. Brady and gave him a lovely humble smile, full of sweet pleading. She took Mr. Brady into her confidence and said she must make an urgent call. Would Mr. Brady give her a nickel and put it on the bill.

All of a sudden Judy felt sick.

She knew her mother's burning beauty had not been for her, nor was it now for Mr. Brady. She did not want to hear her mother make the telephone call. She went and stood at the door and stared up at a little star snug among its elders. The star began blinking so hard that it made her eyes water.

When she heard the nickel ring in the telephone box, she began to sing shrilly and kept on singing until her mother came out of the booth and bade Mr. Brady a wonderful good night.

All the way home Judy would not look at her mother. She played a skipping game that kept her a pace ahead. Her mother kept saying loving things, but Judy pretended not to hear and would give no loving answers.

At the door her mother reminded her, My precious, don't bother to mention to your father about the telephone call. I dialed the wrong number and lost my nickel, so I didn't really make it after all.

When Judy went in she said, Good night father, with her head hanging down. She hated him, too, and ran off to bed without once begging to stay up.

In the morning Judy made herself believe that last night had been a bad dream. She ran all the way home from school. Her mother greeted her with a hug and kiss. She looked very alive and kept smiling at Judy, with the

blood flooding her cheeks and her eyes star bright in her head.

Judy ate her lunch. The table was pretty, but there was unwashed company china in the sink. The plate her mother placed before her was not a company plate.

The lunch was soft things but they stuck in Judy's throat. She felt excited and sad. Suddenly her mother was saying, Darling, I sent your money off myself. I was passing the post-office this morning, and it seemed rather silly to make a second trip this noon. You won't tell your father, will you? He thought it would please you to send it yourself. But you're mother's big girl, aren't you, my precious? And you aren't disappointed, are you?

No'm, said Judy, and she never said No'm. Her heart was standing in her throat. She thought it would burst.

That night she went to bed before the father came for dinner. She said she felt sick in her stomach, and in fact she did. She did not want the light, nor a book, nor her doll. She shut her eyes tight. The father tiptoed into the room. She lay very still. His lips brushed her forehead. He tiptoed out. She put her mouth in the pillow and sobbed herself to sleep.

It was not so bad the first week. After every mail she would make herself believe the moving picture machine would surely come on the next. But the week passed. An-

other week began. The father said, It ought to come this week anyway. Her mother added cheerfully, oh, yes.

The second week ended. The third week began. Then the father said, Shall I help you write them a letter, Judy?

Her eyes met her mother's bright unwavering ones. I forgot the address, she said.

Thereafter the father did not speak of the matter again. He said Judy must just consider it an unfortunate experience and profit by it.

Saturday morning of the fourth week it was Judy who got the mail that the elevator boy had pushed under the door sill. There was a letter addressed to herself. It bore Mr. Fisher's return address. The other letters fell from her hand. She stumbled blindly into her room and opened the envelope.

It was not really a letter. It was a newspaper page. There was a picture of a little girl and a story with easy words about how she had kept some pictures that belonged to Mr Fisher, though he had written her twice to return them. The police had come and taken her to jail, where she had stayed forever and ever. Her mother got sick and died from worrying. Her father lost his job

because his daughter was a thief and had to beg on the streets.

Judy was so terrified she could not stir. Her eyes dilated. She could not swallow. She began to itch all over.

After a long time she folded the newspaper page and hid it under her mattress. She flung herself across the bed, quivering and unable to cry. She would suffer like this at the peal of a bell, at an unfamiliar voice, at an unexpected sound, and she would share this pain with no one. For she knew even if she screwed up the courage to go to a grown-up, she would get the untruthful answer, children don't go to jail, when there was that picture of that little girl which proved that they did.

The doorbell jangled. Judy jumped off the bed, scuttled under it, and drew herself up into a ball, banging her head against the floor, and holding her breath hard.

God, she prayed, let me die.

But children do not die. They grow up to be the strange things called mothers and fathers. Very few parents profit by childhood experiences. When they look back they do not really remember. They see through a sentimental haze. For childhood is full of unrequited love, and suffering, and tears.

# Photographs For Pavel Tchelitchew

CHARLES HENRI FORD

1

Children who hang by their hands  
know the weight of the ground;  
but your fingers are blindfolded.

2

Look at the rabbit nailed to the door  
and the man who did it:  
your mind's hat  
produces the live ones for him to shoot at.

3

There's a doll in a glass box,  
a dog at her feet,  
a bird on her head  
and nothing to eat.

4

The woman with her back turned,  
whose forehead you see,  
is not in prison on her balcony,  
is not in prison.

5

Dream on the way out, little child,  
embedded in the exit:  
your awakening wont be too small  
for the socks on the wall  
nor you too wild or eccentric.

6

Turn around, this one,  
pay attention, that,  
for you have a piece of chalk  
and I have the mumps.

## 7

This old man sitting here  
with his hat on the end of a rose  
is not thinking about what you suppose.

## 8

"The ice-cream lady is dozing  
and her hair is melting.  
Lazy man standing by her,  
can't you put out that fire?"  
"Pardon me, gentleman fine,  
but the sun is not mine."  
"In that case make a breeze,  
so she will freeze."  
"I would if I could, mister,  
I would if I could."

## 9

Whenever two brooms stand on broomsticks  
two girls do their tricks:  
one in a white dress runs before  
and hides her head,  
the other one in red  
hides a little more.

## 10

If only I had a mule to shoe  
like you do,  
instead of shaking hands with all four feet  
I'd teach him to dance on his thumbs.  
And that would be a thing or two.

## Book Reviews

"BLACK"—Humphrey Gilkes — Constable, London, 304 pp. Price 7s 6d net

*By Frances Grant*

In "Black", a simple and sensitive story of a Negro orphan, Humphrey Gilkes gives us the chance to see the race problem projected against a London and Capetown background.

Little Michael Black, a London orphan and general factotum in a disreputable house in London, is introduced to us as he suddenly presents himself to Miss Hopeworth, a kindly English spinster who has offered safe conduct to a group of slum children leaving London for a holiday in the country. Miss Hopeworth's utter amazement (not untinged with actual horror) at finding one member of her group a Negro, her instant realization that she cannot include him in the group, her chagrin when she discovers that Michael is not interested in the children who spurn him, all set the pattern for the conflicts of the story.

Michael does get to the country; neither a good bishop's charity nor that bishop's wife's prejudice keeps him from finding shelter with a family of Prices. They take him in because, as Mrs. Price says, "Mr. Price and myself would be quite glad to take in the little nigger boy, sir, if

you can't find a place for him. . . Since our boy, Leslie, went to live amongst them in Africa, we've always got a fancy for a black face; and a boy's a boy whether he's black or white."

Michael's whole life is a conflict against the activities of blacks and whites who attempt to interpret his life for him, and to whom he always, for one reason or another, presents a problem.

First he goes swimming in the country. One day he is surprised to meet at the river a pretty little girl, black as he is, swimming. He learns that she is Anna, the daughter of an African chieftain who is transacting business in London. The two are strangely drawn to each other, and Anna agrees to write Michael when she gets to Africa. Miss Hopeworth, who suddenly surprises the bathers taking a sun bath one afternoon, raises the cry of a moral as well as a racial menace; and Michael is about to be packed off to town. He is allowed to stay, however, to take part in a local concert. His playing of the banjo surprises and pleases the crowd; but the primitive abandon of his dancing outrages the middle-class prudery of

all but a few, and Michael is shipped off to London.

Through a period of ups and downs in his attempts to keep his job as a bell-hop in various London hotels and indulge his musical talent, we find Michael seeking for romance. He had heard once or twice from Anna—but she is in Africa. He is rather roughly informed by a London bobby as he walks along the Thames embankment with a white girl, "You leave white girls alone and try black ones."

As Michael's despair at being able to find girls of his own race increases, a letter comes from Anna in Capetown, Africa, where she had gone to get rid of a child by one Jim Newlands, a local bully, who had deceived her. She still longs to see Michael and gives him her new address.

For reasons he himself could least of all have explained, Michael decides to go to Capetown, not only to find Anna and help her, but also to exact revenge from Jim Newlands.

His trip to South Africa is one of the most interesting portions of the book. When he arrives there, he searches blindly and unsuccessfully for Anna; finally he reaches her in a hospital where she is at the brink of death from a self-in-

duced abortion. He offers his blood for a transfusion; and later leaves the hospital, not sure whether Anna will live or die, to find Jim Newland.

The end of the story is bitter, not wholly satisfying; and yet the demands of poetic justice are met.

As I read the story I was amazed at this English writer's use of "coon" and "nigger". They did not seem English. "Coon" is distinctly of American origin. Even Dickens in his "American Notes," writing of his trip to a New York cabaret, uses the terms "Negro" and "blacks" as typically English.

The narrative moves swiftly; there is nothing noteworthy, however, in the literary style and development of the plot. There are no beautifully written paragraphs to which one might turn again for the sheer joy of reading. Mr. Gilkes, nevertheless, has a story to tell; he goes about it in a direct fashion; and what power the story has lies in its stark acceptance of prejudice in specific situations, and the inevitable tragedy of human struggle against it. If one does not ask too much of literary value, he will find "Black" interesting reading.

## BOOK REVIEW (Continued)

"BLACK THUNDER"—Anna Bontemps — Published by The MacMillan Co.,  
New York, 298 pp. \$2.50

*Dorothy R. Peterson*

This book is essentially the writing of a poet. From its opening pages in which old Ben, the slave, "placed the candle above his head and it threw on his shoulders a dull blue radiance weaker than the light a ghost carries", the lines of poetry continue through the course of the descriptions of slave life on the plantations around Richmond, the slaves' "whisperings" of freedom, and the simple and bold plan evolved by them for obtaining their freedom by doing violence to the white inhabitants of Virginia. It is still ringing in the answers of the slave leaders after they have been apprehended and are facing the prosecutors and justices who are trying to implicate the French residents of Richmond in the slave revolt. To the last, when we leave old Ben, apprehensive of his safety, feeling that "for him the rain-swept streets had a carnival sadness", each line is rich with the beauty of a poet's phrases.

Besides this wealth of poetry, the intimacy which the author reveals with each of his characters, his authentic knowledge of the psychology of the old Southern world of slaves and masters, the

fitness of the words that fall from the lips of each, make every line convincing and every person believable. Each page becomes alive with the questions and arguments on the one vital topic of the day: freedom. Gabriel lives as surely in the pages of Black Thunder as did the Gabriel of the historic rebellion of 1800.

'A man is got a right to have his freedom in the place where he's born', is his stubborn rejoinder to any suggestion that he plot or act otherwise than he does, whether the criticism comes from other slaves who want to temper his plans or from his white accusers. When these latter continue their questioning: 'Did you imagine that other well-fed, well-kept slaves would join you?' his fearless answer: 'Wouldn't you jine us, was you a slave, suh?' is a challenge to their dignity as men.

Black Thunder is a story of defeat and return to submission for the slaves. It is far more, however, a story of courage and an indefinable kind of victory for those intrepid souls, slaves and freed men, who dared plot to strike at their masters in a simple ignorant way. Many readers may feel with

me that this story of the slaves' self-initiated fight for freedom, although a failure, represents more clearly than we have had brought to our attention in other stories of slave days the power and daring of the slaves and the real fear that such a display of power inspired in their masters.

If I say little about the chapters devoted to the Jacobins, it is because those pages seemed less interesting, and, too, because the author strives to dissociate the violent action of the slaves from any influence that the words or writings of the Jacobins might have wielded had they been able to reach the

slaves. In this way those chapters become dissociated from the story. They do not detract from the interest of the plot but, while they do inform us of the activities of the slaves' sympathizers and hint at what effect French ideas have had in other slave countries, they do not add to the strong dramatic material of which the story is really composed.

Mr. Bontemps has given us a novel of power and interest, which is unfailing in its beauty of expression. Further than that he has revealed to us a historic episode from a period on which we may need this enlightening.

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## Dear Reader

We are giving all our space to C. C. G. who sent us a pretty explosive letter from Memphis. He softened it with a subscription, however, and we wondered if it was a bribe. Still we needed the subscription, so what could we do, and here it is:

" . . . When I ran across the third issue of your quarterly, I decided that of all the various things I'd picked up in a few years of collecting Negro publications CHALLENGE was undoubtedly the trashiest (disregarding, of course, Wallace Thurman's, God rest his soul, novels). Your fourth issue now in my hands lifts my opinion ever so slightly, if only because of your frank notations under "Voices" concerning Miss DeShield and Alfred Mendes. Your young writers contribute the most inept effusions you publish but one remembers their youngness and notes only their excellent flair for detail. (But I did gag at Freedgood's "Under the Tree"). Most disappointing are those who, young once, showed promise surpassing even your latest young 'uns. I'm thinking of Waring Cuney's "Song of a Song", Mae V. Cowdery's two 'poems' in your third issue, and Helene

Johnson's "Let me Sing my Song". Look in FIRE (remember it?) and you'll see the same poetry but refreshing then in that they were new and showed promise. (That Waring at this date should come up with a song to the masses! Your title and cover must have fooled him).

In your fourth issue Richard Bruce—pardon, I meant Gary George (I knew him when he was Bruce Nugent) shows himself to be the same exquisite stylist of "Smoke, Lilies and Jade"—such a stylist in fact that his prose to my mind most approaches art and atones for any lack of thought behind his work. This same basic lack of any depth of true or imaginative thought underlies nine-tenths of your contributions. Claude McKay's sonnet in this latest issue! Is mere facility with form really literature? "Honeymoon" can only be salvage from the pen of the finest of the New Negro poets. Young Yerby seems to be your finest bet if (let us pray) he may only keep a bit more than his promise. Your articles seem a bit better than your stories and poems but I refrain from criticism of them, being more interested in the latter forms.

Which doesn't mean that I don't wish many years of growth to the first essentially literary Negro publication which has gotten beyond Vol. I No. I, and that I am not interested intensely in everything I read in CHALLENGE. You show much promise, but please hurry to keep that promise."

We are going to try, C. C. G.—D. W.

—0:00—

## Voices

We wish we could prod MILDRED JONES into taking up her artist's tools again. Her cover is fine, but it is not enough.

WILLIAM A. ATTAWAY is a young student in Chicago.

A letter from PAUL TREMAINE reads:

"Began life at the age of eleven, when I first learned about myself in an orphan's home, 'way down South. . . I do not believe in God nor man nor anything much. . . I have searched everywhere and nearly drove myself insane trying to find an answer that would fit me and my life. . . I am neither white nor black. The saddest part of it all is that I look too white to be ever taken for a black man. So I am an outcast. From the white race because I am not a hypocrite, and from the black race because they do not want me around with my white manners and white skin."

F. V. S. EVANS promised us this story last summer on his way back to Trinidad from Montreal, where he had gone to get a wife.

MYRON A. MAHLER, getting his Master's at C. C. N. Y., changes his style and contributes another story.

After several months MARY CHRISTOPHER reappears in our pages.

We are glad to print another portrait in the interesting series by ESLANDA GOODE ROBESON, who is somewhere abroad at this writing.

LOUIS G. SUTHERLAND is really going to write that novel some day.

We are beginning to regard LOUIS EMANUEL MARTIN as one of our favorite contributors.

CHARLES HENRI FORD is the American editor for *Caravel*, a magazine published in Spain.

We have no biographical note on PARKER TYLER. We believe he is a New Yorker.

NAN BOSTON is a name new to CHALLENGE.

LANGSTON HUGHES has been going to Spain for over a year and was last seen somewhere in the middle west.

From Bordentown, N. J., where she teaches, FRANCES GRANT sends us this review.

DOROTHY PETERSON is a member of a distinguished Negro family and has an enviable cultural background.

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*CHALLENGE is primarily interested in material by Negro writers. But all writers are invited to contribute to its pages.*

